

How Should I Care for Myself as a Caregiver?

As a caregiver, you have a higher risk for health and emotional problems. That's because caregivers are less likely than noncaregivers to attend to their own health by eating nutritious foods, getting physical activity and treating physical and emotional problems. It feels like your first responsibility is to your loved one, but it's really to yourself. Learn to organize your duties as a caregiver and find the time to take care of your own health. It will help you do a better job for your loved one.



Tips for Caregiver Success

The National Family Caregivers Association offers these 10 tips for family caregivers.

1. Choose to take charge of your life, and don't let your loved one's illness or disability always take centerstage.
2. Remember to be good to yourself. Love, honor and value yourself. You're doing a very hard job and you deserve some quality time just for you.
3. Watch out for signs of depression and don't delay in getting professional help when you need it.
4. When people offer to help, accept the offer and suggest specific things they can do.
5. Educate yourself about your loved one's condition. Information is empowering.
6. There's a difference between caring and doing. Be open to new technologies and ideas that promote your loved one's independence and help you do your job easier.
7. Trust your instincts. Most of the time they'll lead you in the right direction.
8. Grieve for your losses and then allow yourself to dream new dreams.
9. Stand up for your rights as a caregiver and as a citizen.
10. Seek support from other caregivers. There is great strength in knowing that you are not alone.

How do I care for my physical health?

Eat right, make time for physical activity and keep all your medical appointments. Monitor these risk factors for heart attack and stroke:

- Tobacco smoke
- High blood cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Physical inactivity
- Obesity and overweight

- Diabetes mellitus

Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit americanheart.org to learn more about risk factors and how to manage them.

For information on stroke and stroke risk factors, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit StrokeAssociation.org.

How do I care for my emotional health?

Caregiving can have a great emotional impact. It's important to learn the signs of clinical depression and get help if you experience several of these symptoms for two weeks or more.

Depression can often be treated with medication. If you need help dealing with your emotions, seek out a support group, counselor or physician.

What are the warning signs of heart attack and stroke?

Warning Signs of Heart Attack

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly with mild pain or discomfort with one or more of these symptoms:

- Chest discomfort
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body
- Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort
- Other signs including breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness

Warning Signs of Stroke

- Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

Learn to recognize a stroke. Time lost is brain lost.

Call 9-1-1 ... Get to a hospital immediately if you experience signs of a heart attack or stroke!

Do you have questions or comments for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

Can you recommend a counselor who will understand my needs as a caregiver

and help me cope?
